

Consumer Reports Health BEST BUY DRUGS

Free Guidance for Consumers on Prescription Medicines



NEWS UPDATE

ConsumerReportsHealth.org/BestBuyDrugs

Are Your Prescription Drugs Safe?

The Food and Drug Administration approved them, your doctor prescribes them, and you see them advertised on TV — so your medications must be safe, right?

More than half of all prescription drugs cause adverse effects — some serious or fatal — that aren't detected until after the FDA approves them, sometimes many years later. In 2008 alone, the FDA received more than 100,000 reports of serious injuries related to adverse drug events, an increase of about 25 percent over the previous year, according to the [Institute for Safe Medication Practices](#).

In addition, the U.S. system for identifying drug risks before approval is flawed — and the one for spotting them afterward is even worse. [Take a closer look at why you face these unexpected dangers, and what you can do to protect yourself.](#)

Prescription Drug Insurance

How to pick the best Medicare Part D plan

It's that time of year again. Open enrollment for 2009 for the Medicare Part D drug benefit takes place from Nov. 15 through Dec. 31, 2009. You should enroll by Dec. 15, though, to avoid potential coverage lapses and problems filling your prescriptions. Your coverage will be in effect from Jan. 1 through Dec. 31, 2010.

Whether you are enrolling for the first time or considering switching, you might have dozens of private plans to choose from, with differing premiums, co-payments, and levels of coverage — including which drugs are covered. As a result, we strongly urge Medicare beneficiaries to:

- Understand the drug coverage you already have, if any.
- Get information on the Part D benefit in advance.
- Set aside time to study your choices and compare plans in detail.
- Seek independent outside information and advice, if needed.
- Pick a plan carefully.

Premiums are projected to increase by an average of 11 percent next year, with some of the biggest plans charging an estimated six to 22 percent more than they did in 2009. The average monthly premium for basic benefits is estimated to be about \$37, according to a Kaiser Family Foundation report, but premium ranges will vary widely, from around \$9 per month for some plans to more than \$120 for other plans. There are a number of factors to consider in choosing a plan. [Read on for more details](#) on how to choose a plan, avoid the doughnut hole and what you can do if you think you may enter it next year.

Off-label Prescribing

The most common insomnia drug is one you've probably never heard of

What's among the most widely prescribed drug for insomnia—*Ambien*? *Lunesta*? Yes, but there's also another: a nearly 30-year-old generic antidepressant called trazodone, which causes drowsiness as a potentially useful side effect.

Trazodone is not approved by the Food and Drug Administration for treating insomnia (though doctors can legally prescribe it for this and other treatments). There's very little clinical trial evidence on whether it's effective for that purpose when there's no accompanying depression, and only modest evidence when there is. But numerous doctors use it because they believe that

trazodone is the best sleep medication for many people.

[Here's why trazodone has become so popular—and what to do if your doctor suggests you try it.](#)

For additional information on more than [200 prescription drugs](#), alternatives to high-priced drugs and Best Buy selections for the most common, chronic medical conditions, visit [ConsumerReportsHealth.org/BestBuyDrugs](#).

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